Why We Need the Canon Wars

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The Venerable Bede relates how Pope Gregory I, upon encountering two boys in a slave market, is told they are *Angles*. This word itself then tells him that they and their people are destined to be "coheirs" of the angels, and through Bede's ears—or imagination—the prophetic slippage enters history. In this moment, English vindicates itself definitively. Solemn Providence is initially exemplified.

It is common Scripture that makes a people. By English *Scripture*, here, is meant our canon—an essentially controversial conception, in multiple respects. The cultural and institutional space it occupies is roughly that of a national church, of which none exists. Its authority is absolute but sublime—"invisible."

"It is common Scripture that makes a people."

Central to this canon is the Tyndale Bible, superseded by the Authorized King James Version of 1611, and then—forever—by no other. The works of William Shakespeare are equally sacred to it, while the epic poetry of John Milton is scarcely less doctrinally imposing. Its most formidable outposts include the great classics of Adam Smith and Charles Darwin. Those peoples under the direction of such a canon—as though under a supreme law—are called

here *the English*. If this label is not predominantly aggravating, it has failed.

Canonization submits to principle. There can be additions, but no subtractions. No particle of the canon, however questionable it comes to be found, is ever deleted. Since once added, nothing can ever be subsequently subtracted, positive modification of the canon becomes a matter of uttermost solemnity.

There is vastly more to be said about this, but also, and more importantly, not vastly more to add. Conservatism is synonymous with respect, and extreme conservatism with veneration. Inflation epitomizes degeneracy. No more than monetary inflation or grade inflation is canon inflation wisely tolerated.

The claims of *Beowulf* and Bede cannot easily be denied. Among canonically authorized English translations from the classical languages, Dryden's *Aeneid* suggests a model. Who is to be comparably anointed for carrying—with ultimate solemnity—Homer and the tragedians, Hesiod, Sappho, the ancient philosophers and historians, Euclid, Ovid, and Cicero into our tongue? Taking Leviathan as our clue, of which English must always speak—our patron saint is after all dragon-slayer—we can add Hobbes, securely, and Melville (*Moby Dick* only). The canonical prospects of Malthus, Hume, Gibbon, and Ricardo

are unquestionably strong. Among the poets, Blake and Pound are serious. Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*, only), and McCarthy (*Blood Meridian*, only), are too recent for confident promotion from the solid para-canon, even if no sane reader could seriously doubt the status of either. The major works of Tolkien have undergone spontaneous popular canonization in a fashion without parallel, but insufficient time has passed for any greater endorsement. Lovecraft is likewise impeded from canonization by his novelty —thankfully, since his case is peculiarly difficult, if also queerly compelling.

On this note, it has to be admitted, realistically, that no core English canon will be remotely "diverse and inclusive" in the dominant contemporary usage of these terms. "Equity" is more alien to it still. Canonization therefore, by necessity, makes of "DEI" imperatives an implacable enemy (even if Jews and Scots have added much, and Octavia Butler—*Xenogenesis* only—can be promoted into the para-canon without reluctance). Securing the core canon brings a neatly lined-up culture war for free. If this were a war to be waged by man alone, its outcome would be deeply doubtful. It is not waged by man alone, or even man primarily. What works—invisibly—through us works most, and at last entirely. (This is our occult *faith*.)

Solemn Providence is not an object of sensible sympathy.

Canon consolidation is the rightful topic of our loftiest controversies and holiest wars. The canon apprehends religion as culture, and culture as literature. Within it, identities are theatrical (even the highest). This does not diminish them, but rather elevates them, into the Angelic intercourse. It means, however, when interpreted crudely, that things can turn strange. We arrive here at *critique*, but will not yet dwell upon it.

Within literature, all voices merit ironic detachment, which is only to say that—from the other side—they exceed all subjective credulity. Our participation in their messages is wise when most cautious in judgment. While everything within the mortal sphere is history, there is no history without narration. The difference between religion and literary history is only confusion, even if confusion—too—has its strict necessities. The parts we play are scripted beyond us. We shall be unfathomably religious, as we enter into the apocalypse of our tongue.

English literary supremacy, as Kenneth Clark observes most popularly, is rooted in the iconoclasm of Protestant revolution. Milton's literal blindness dramatizes this. Our words arise amid the crashing fall of

idols. An idol is a mask seen as something other than a mask. *Believe nothing that can possibly not be believed*. This is English. It is an obscurely-sourced commandment that can, of course, go very wrong.

"Our words arise amid the crashing fall of idols."

The common people are beginning to ask, as they must, *what the hell is happening in our university literature departments, and downstream from them, in our schools?* Negative answers to these questions, while important, do not finally suffice. Yes, it is the idolatry of sovereign politics that now prevails in our Babylon, but it does so because something else, and something more basic, has seemingly failed. Cultural faith—*transcendental faith*, it might be said, in the intellectual dialect of the Germans—has collapsed. Scripture is conceived as no more than a devious manifesto, through which we define ourselves, under ideological direction.

The ruin is immense—*biblical*—but the meaning of Biblical Revelation is notoriously poorly understood. Biblical Revelation is primarily the self-validation of Scripture as such. It speaks of the world only derivatively. It is not, at all, that Scripture has apocalypse as its object, still less as an object among others. Scripture *is* the apocalypse. Already, we inhabit it.

Prophecy is rigorously inter-translatable with time-travel, which means it is essentially implausible. If prophecy ever

occurs, at all, the way of things cannot be as it seems. What prophecy then says, primarily, is almost entirely independent of its message. Whether *there is prophecy* means more than anything it might say. So, is there prophecy? To settle this question, and any others of comparable gravity, falls not to us, but to Solemn Providence. It is here, exactly, that we are divided from our enemies. Sacred destiny stands upon one side, sovereign politics upon the other.

There is no profound time intuition without shock of religious intensity. We relate to hyper-intelligences, or sublime super-intelligences, not as a video-game character to a superior video-game character, but as a video-game character to a video-game player, or designer—at least approximately. While things are surely not as simple as this conceptual parable suggests, they are still more surely no less complex. There will be minds beyond our horizon, and since our temporal frame is then itself exceeded, there always will have been. This is to state the reality minimally, proofed against even the most corrosive atheism. Eternity throbs with angels. Is this metaphysics of intelligence subsumption something that cannot (even by the English) be finally disbelieved? I suspect that many might be tempted to initially contest it. Nevertheless, in the end, you will submit. Solemn Providence requires it.

In the meantime, while we're waiting, *don't screw with the canon*. A provisional conservative coalition for scriptural integrity begins here, and is already—if inchoately—in effect. It merits encouragement. Whoever or whatever the True Lord of Heaven should prove to be, this is his work. This holds firm even if the True Lord of Heaven, by common acceptance, is nothing at all. If the death of God is not mandated by English Scripture, it is most certainly tolerated therein, at least for a spell. Culture is the great faith, within which doctrinal specifics, even the loftiest, count for little. From Scripture, all interpretation descends.

Whether and how the Bible—the Authorized King James Version of 1611, and only that—is believed, or disbelieved, and in either case how, is downstream of its canonicity. It should, regardless, as all those who are with us must accept, *be taught*, prior to any interpretation. On this point, the fundamentalist case is impeccable. What the Bible says does not depend upon what it means, but only the inverse. Its cultural authority, or canonicity, is solely grounded in the former, and not the latter. It is not even seriously shaken by being entirely disbelieved. What needs to be believed will be believed, when needed.

Belief matters little. It is fragile, and narrow. The meanest miracle can wash it away, like a hovel in the path of a deluge. Quite different is faith in Scripture, invulnerable to the vicissitudes of belief. It is this that English education, under Solemn Providence, forever fortifies. Such faith is secure against the wiliest subtleties of Lucifer himself, so long as they are typographically inerrant. The canon—assuming only its integrity—absorbs any magnitude of doubt, undisturbed.

Sublime intelligence has established the 1611 Bible as the keystone of the English canon, so that through it signs and wonders will be manifested. This is the core and irreducible prophecy, outside of which our people have no future. Peoples without veneration for their angels are done.

Amid all our snark and skepticism, this—at least—can be maintained with perfect epistemological assurance: all the properly canonical works of the English language were composed under the exact tuition of some profound Questioning Angel, absorbing all our doubt into itself, with invulnerable Anglossic faith as its residual. It is this that Pope Gregory I understood, through the illumination of Solemn Providence.

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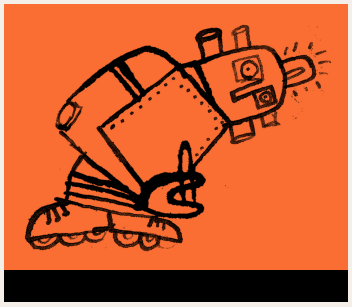

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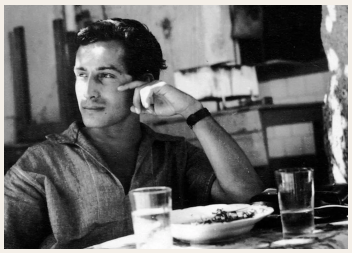

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